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CONNECTICUT POST
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West's bighorns struggle with drought, disease

ASSOCIATED PRESS

RENO, Nev. — Wildlife experts say about a third of Nevada's largest herd of California bighorn sheep may have died of a respiratory ailment that began claiming animals last winter.

Another dead bighorn was found Sunday in the Santa Rosa Mountains north of Winnemucca, leading scientists to suspect the die-off is not over.

"It's not a good sign," Mike Dobel, a game biologist with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, told the *Reno Gazette-Journal*.

"We were hoping that the event would have exhausted itself. It appears we still have something going on."

The latest animal showed evidence of pneumonia and other lung damage, the same fatal condition experts believe already has reduced the Santa Rosa herd from about 290 sheep in 2003 to 190 today.

Experts are particularly concerned because the Santa Rosa herd represents one of the biggest success stories in Nevada's efforts to re-establish bighorn sheep, which nearly disappeared across the state after the arrival of European settlers and disease-carrying domestic sheep.

Twelve California bighorns were introduced in the Santa Rosa Mountains in 1978, and by last year the population approached 300.

Concern arose just before Christmas when state officials started hearing stories of hunters finding sick and dead bighorns. Samples taken from dead and healthy bighorn provide some clues but few solid answers as to the source of the problem.

Alton Ward, a microbiologist who studied the die-off, said the Santa

Rosa bighorns were substantially weakened by a variety of factors last winter.

Prolonged drought reduced forage and lack of food might have weakened the herd, Ward noted in a report to the Nevada wildlife agency.

Twice-normal snowfall in December further could have weakened the animals by causing them to burn more energy pushing through deep snow.

Parasites, while common in bighorn, could have further diminished nutritional intake and made the bighorns more susceptible to infection resulting in the pneumonia that killed them.

"Those factors could have all contributed," Ward said.

The combination might have resulted in a biological "perfect storm" that combined to produce the die-off, said Rick Furman, a Reno veterinarian and vice president of Nevada Bighorns Unlimited.

"It was probably the additive effects of multiple factors," Furman said. "What we're suspecting is that this population of sheep was debilitated and that made them susceptible to viral infections."

NATION

Associated Press

Defense: The attorney for Nuradin Abdi, indicted for plotting to blow up an Ohio mall, speaks Wednesday to reporters in Columbus, Ohio.

Mall bomb suspect sent for evaluation

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A

Bid to Save Rare Crane Advancing

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Eastern sarus crane.

Cambodian wetlands are breeding grounds for giant cranes.

Vast Wetlands, Few People

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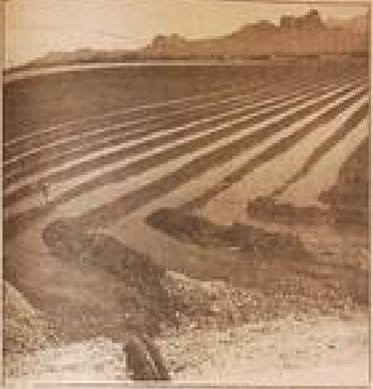
In Baking Wasteland, a Restoration Attempt

It is hard to coax a desert back after it has felt the plow.

[illegible]

'An Acquired Taste'

[illegible]



When irrigated cotton fields like this one in the Sonoran Desert are abandoned, restoration can be difficult because remaining native seeds may be eaten away, making colonization very unlikely.

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Spread of Plants Is Blocked

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High Cost for Seeds

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Desert restoration study sites are near Eloy, Ariz.

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